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Right Significance of "TAT TVAM ASI"

by Swami Sivananda

A Mahavakya in an Upanishad is a transcendental phrase or a great saying which establishes identity or oneness of the individual soul with Brahman. There are altogether four Mahavakyas in the Upanishads. Each Veda contains one Mahavakya. The four Mahavakyas are:

Prajnanam Brahma (Consciousness is Brahman): This is contained in the Aitareya Upanishad of the Rigveda. This is the Svarupa-Bodha-Vakya that explains the nature of Brahman or the Self.

Aham Brahmasmi (I am Brahman): This is contained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of the Yajur Veda. This is the Anusandhana-Vakya or sentence for enquiry.

Tat Tvam Asi (That Thou Art): This is contained in the Chhandogya Upanishad of Sama Veda. This is Upadesha Vakya uttered by the Guru to disciple.

Ayam Atma Brahma (This Atman is Brahman): This is contained in the Mandukya Upanishad of the Atharva Veda. This is the Anubhava-Bodha-Vakya that gives expression to the inner intuitive experience of the innermost Self by the aspirant through meditation or Nididhyasana.

Out of the four Mahavakyas we are concerned here with the Upadesha Vakya Tat Tvam Asi for Pada-Artha-Sodhana or an examination into the real meaning of it.

In the Chhandogya Upanishad it is stated that the sage Uddalaka sends his son Svetaketu to Gurukula for learning the Vedas. Svetaketu accordingly spends twelve full years in learning the scriptures and thus returns home with the vanity of being learned. His father asks him: My dear, why are you so conceited? Have you learnt that, by learning which the unheard becomes heard, the unknown becomes known, the unperceived becomes perceived.

How is it? asks Svetaketu, and the father gives the reply: It is just as by knowing one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known: for whatever the modifications of the effects are, they are only names, and have their origin in speech. One who knows the cause knows all its effects, since the cause and its effects are non-different. Then Uddalaka gives various examples for ascertaining the cause of the universe. His instructions may be summed up as follows:

The effect is nothing but the cause. Hence the body is nothing but food, food is nothing but water, water is nothing but fire, fire is nothing but Sat. Sat alone is true, and That thou art.

When a man sleeps he becomes one with Sat and hence in his case it is said Svapiti, which means he attains his own Self in sleep. This Sat is the real cause of the universe.

When a man dies his speech is dissolved in the mind, the mind is dissolved in the Prana, the Prana is dissolved in fire, fire is dissolved in Sat. This Sat is thy Self - That thou art.

Sage Uddalaka gives nine examples and repeats the Mahavakya Tat Tvam Asi, with each of them, to bring home to Svetaketu the real significance of the great sentence. Evidently the qualifying pronoun That refers to Sat or God, the creator, and Thou refers to the individual soul. Art or Asi connects them both, indicating thus an identity between the two, which is the subject matter of consideration in this present essay.

Objection 1: But in what way can Godhood be attributed to an individual? They both have antagonistic qualities. They can never be identical. But as Vishnu is read in an image, or as Aditya, Agni, etc., are worshipped as Brahman, in the same way Godhood can be attributed to the Jiva.

Reply: No, it cannot be. 'Tat Tvam Asi' has a totally different signification. The word 'etc' in the above objection signifies that Aditya, Agni, and the like are not themselves Brahman. Similarly an image itself is not Brahman. But this is not the case with the Mahavakya.

Objection 2: This may be used in the case of Stuti or glorification, just as it is said: thou art Indra, Varuna etc.

Reply: No, Svetaketu cannot be glorified by his father, who is superior to him in position and knowledge.

Objection 3: It may be used in a secondary sense, just as someone may say: 'Thou art a lion,' meaning thereby 'thou art as brave as a lion.'

Reply: Secondary sense has no place here since the instruction of Uddalaka is on the knowledge of the cause, vide for example, as by knowing a clod of earth one can know all its effects.

Objection 4: If Svetaketu is Sat, there is no necessity of knowing himself, and the instruction is of no avail.

Reply: No; due to illusory identification with the body, mind, etc., the Self which is Sat is not known. When the illusion vanishes, Sat shines by its own light. The instruction that the unheard becomes heard etc. signifies that Sat is not known by the senses and the intellect. On the other hand it is known by direct perception or intuition. Thus we proceed with our enquiry into the real meaning of 'Tat Tvam Asi' which establishes non-duality, cutting off the tree of Samsara.

Samanadhikaranya

This is the relation of abiding in a common substratum, as for instance, the ether in a pot (Ghata) and the ether in a temple (Matha) have a common substratum. Being limited by pot and temple they differ apparently; yet by negating the limiting adjuncts, viz., the pot and the temple, we find the same ether undifferentiated.

Pot-ether (Ghatakasa) is not equal to Temple-ether (Mathakasa). But, Pot-ether minus Pot is equal to Temple-ether minus Temple. Ether is equal to Ether.

This is the case of Samanadhikaranya. The same holds good in the case of 'Tat' and 'Tvam,' which we will prove by considering their indicative meaning.

In order to know the meaning of a sentence one must know the meaning of each 'Pada' or word. Every word is related to its meaning. This relationship is called exposition or Vritti.

There are two Vrittis:

Sakti-Vritti (Force)

Lakshana-Vritti (indication)

Sakti Vritti: It is the potency inherent in the word by which one is able to know its meaning. When the word Jar is uttered, one is able to know the roundness, its neck, etc., only by its Sakti-Vritti. But one word may have different interpretations according as they are used in different circumstances. This further specification of Sakti-Vritti by which we ascertain a possible meaning is called 'Sakya' or 'Possible.' The meaning thus ascertained is called 'Sakyartha' or 'Vachyartha.' As, for example, in the Mahavakya 'Tat tvam asi' we are not concerned with all the individual cases of 'Tat' and 'Tvam.' Here these are adjectival pronouns qualifying God and Jiva. We mean by them God and Jiva respectively. Hence Vachyartha or Sakyartha of Tat is God and that of Tvam is 'Jiva.'

Without the knowledge of Vachyartha (possible meaning of a term) no knowledge of indication is produced.

Lakshana Vritti: That which indicates or distinguishes a word is called indication. It is of three varieties:

Jahat-Lakshana

Ajahat-Lakshana

Bhagatyaga-Lakshana

(1) Jahat-Lakshana (non-inclusive indication): In the sentence, There is a village in the Ganga, if we take the Vachyartha of Ganga, we cannot make out the sense of the sentence, since a village can never be situated in the Ganga. But if we abandon the literal meaning of the word Ganga and make it to signify its bank, then the sentence has a correct meaning. Hence the Jahat-Lakshana of the Pada Ganga is its bank. Thus in Jahat-Lakshana the whole of the Vachyartha is abandoned and it (Vachyartha) is made to indicate a totally different thing.

(2) Ajahat-Lakshana (inclusive indication): In the sentence, The white is galloping, we can make out the meaning of the sentence by introducing a word 'horse' into it and thus meaning 'The white horse is galloping.' The word 'white' indicates a larger sense. Here the Ajahat-Lakshana of the word 'white' is horse. Thus in Ajahat-Lakshana the whole of the Vachyartha is retained and something more is included into it.

(3) Bhaga-Tyaga-Lakshana or Jahadajahat-Lakshana (indication abiding in the one part of the meaning while the other part of it is abandoned):

This is the combination of Jahat and Ajahat, which mean, literally, leave and take, respectively. A portion of the Vachyartha is left out, and a portion of it is taken.

As, for instance, when a thing seen in a prior period is found subsequently in another place, a person is apt to say That is This. A person named Devadatta, for example, seen a few years back in Calcutta may be seen today in Rishikesh, and thus we may recognise him by saying: That is this Devadatta. Here That refers to a thing seen in the past time, and in another place, and This conveys the sense of the present time at the present moment. Hence two adjectival pronouns referring to the past and the present apply contradictions. Therefore, by abandoning the indications of 'That' and 'This' the apparent inconsistency is removed, and as both of them refer to the same substance, their equality is identity.

To put it algebraically we have to equate:

That is not equal to This.

Considering Vachyarthas of both the words, we find:

Dedavatta plus Past time is not equal to Devadatta plus Present time. Applying Bhagatyaga in both the terms:

Devadatta is equal to Devadatta. Thus Bhagatyaga-Lakshana of That Pada is Devadatta, and that of This Pada also is Devadatta. The equality is that of identity.

Now let us proceed to consider as to which of the Lakshanas is applicable in the case of Tat tvam Pada.

1. JAHAT-LAKSHANA IS INAPPLICABLE:

The conclusion of Vedanta with reference to the signification of 'That' and 'Thou' is to establish the non-duality or identity of the witnessing intelligence of the individual with the Universal or Brahman-intelligence. Hence both the Padas, 'Tat' and 'Tvam' contain within themselves, 'Brahman' and 'Atman,' respectively.

If Jahat-Lakshana is applied in construing the sentence, their Vachyarthas will be completely abandoned and another object will be introduced as what is to be known. This another object must be devoid of intelligence and hence the purpose of the Mahavakya remains unserved.

2. AJAHAT-LAKSHANA IS INAPPLICABLE:

In Ajahat-Lakshana, the literal meaning is wholly retained and something more is introduced into it. If the Vachyarthas of 'Tat' and 'Tvam,' i.e., 'God' and 'Jiva' is retained, both being totally different, such signification is contradictory. Thus Ajahat-Lakshana, too, is inapplicable in the case of the Mahavakya.

3. BHAGA-TYAGA-LAKSHANA IS APPLICABLE:

According to Abhasavada, Maya, the reflected shadow of intelligence in Maya, and the abiding intelligence of Maya, is Isvara, with the attributes of Omnipotence, Omniscience and the rest, and that is indicated by the word Tat. The reflected shadow of intelligence in the distributive aggregates of ignorance as well as its abiding intelligence, is Jiva, with the attributes of finiteness, little-knowingness, etc., and this is indicated by the word Tvam. by applying Bhaga-Tyaga-Lakshana, we will have to abandon a part from each of the Padas, Tat and Tvam. Thus the Lakshyarthas of Tat is Brahman or intelligence which is found by removing the Upadhi (Maya), Upadhi Dharma and Abhasa Chaitanya from its Vachyarthas, Isvara. Similarly the Lakshyarthas of Tvam is Kutastha or witnessing intelligence which is found by removing Upadhi (Avidya), Upadhi-Dharma, and Abhasa-chaitanya from its Vachyarthas, Jiva.

We have to equate:

TAT = TVAM

Applying Bhagatyaga

(God - Upadhi & Upadhi Dharma & Abhasa Chaitanya) = (Jiva - Upadhi & Upadhi Dharma & Abhasa Chaitanya)

Therefore Lakshyarthas:

Chidakasa = Kutastha or Pervading intelligence = Witnessing intelligence or Intelligence = Intelligence.

In the same way we can apply Bhagatyaga-Lakshana from the standpoint of Bimba-Pratibimba-Vada, Karya-Karana-Upadhi-Vada, Avachhinna-Anvachhinnavada and Avachhedavada.

In each case the non-duality of the supreme Self and the individual self is proved. Thus we have seen that Bhagatyaga-Lakshana alone is applicable. To make it clear we may take recourse to either of the following ways:

Vachyarthas of Tat and Vachyarthas of Tvam.

Lakshyarthas of Tat and Vachyarthas of Tvam.

Vachyarthas of Tat and Lakshyarthas of Tvam.

Lakshyarthas of Tat and Lakshyarthas of Tvam.

All the former three cases are clearly absurd. Only the last case is applicable in serving the purpose.

The Method of Connection

It has been already proved that 'Tat' Pada indicates the witnessing intelligence. In their Vachyarthas, 'Tat' Pada is marked by the mistaken conception of indirectness (Parokshata-Bhranti) and 'Tvam' Pada is marked by finitude or (Parichhinnata-Bhranti). To remove these two misconceptions in their Lakshyarthas we should say: 'Tat-Tvam' marking the significance of 'Tat,' subject and 'Tvam' predicate. This removes the first Bhranti, i.e., the misconception of indirectness pertaining to the significance of the Pada 'Tat.' That is to say 'Chidakasa or Brahman is Kutastha.' This gives direct perception, removing the misconception of the indirectness of Chidakasa.

In the same way if we say 'Tvam Tat' we remove the misconception of finitude pertaining to Tvam Pada. Here the significance of 'Tvam' is subject and significance of 'Tat' is predicate. That is to say, 'Kutastha' is 'Chidakasa.' Thus the misconception of finitude pertaining to Kutastha is removed. This, in

short, is the examination in the real significance of 'Tat Tvam Asi.' One who meditates upon it, comes to know that he is not the body, not the mind, is neither doer nor enjoyer, but he is Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute. He becomes full of Bliss by sacrificing the miseries of the world and attains the real nature, i.e. Brahman.

The initiation into the mysteries of 'Tat Tvam Asi' by a Brahmanishtha Guru alone can enable one to know the correct significance of the Mahavakya which destroys Samsara in the same way as the sun dispels darkness.

1. MEANS TO REALISATION

THE GOAL OF LIFE is Self-realisation. It is not the attainment of anything external to us, but it consists in our simply knowing or becoming aware of our eternally Free nature. If it were an impossibility to get convinced that we are Existence-Absolute and eternally Free, why should the Srutis repeatedly teach us that doctrine like an affectionate mother? On the other hand that doctrine contradicts not but asserts our own inner urge, 'Let me ever live in a blissful state free from all pain and misery.'

How the idea of a snake is negated from a rope-snake, so too, the non-Self is negated from the Self that is eternally existing. That is done through reasoning on the evidence of Sruti passages like, 'Tat Tvam Asi' etc. With the dawn of true knowledge, the Self-luminous Self alone shines and the non-self totally disappears into an airy nothing like the disappearance of the snake when the rope is known as such with the aid of a lamp.

Is there a means that can be handled by the aspirant to attain realisation? Are injunctions and prohibitions on Vedic lines applicable to the seeker after Truth?

To put it in a nut-shell, the seeker after Truth cannot be subjected to Vedic injunctions and prohibitions.

The injunctive side of the Scriptures merely restates popular conceptions and beliefs when it says 'do this,' 'Thou art the doer and enjoyer' etc. It points out to a certain object for our attainment. The injunctions and prohibitions are made with sole reference to the object that has got to be attained. Hence, in that case, injunctions and prohibitions are justified.

In all Vedanta (i.e., the Upanishads), nowhere do we find a clear mention of the Self as the object to be attained. The only way by which the Upanishads point the Truth is through the words. 'Neti, Neti.' The Self is never an object for our attainment. Sruti passages like 'Tat Tvam Asi' proclaim the Truth or give us the right Knowledge from the transcendent level, Paramarthic standpoint. They do not, however, point out an object for our attainment. Further, the knowledge arising out of injunctive scriptures gets contradicted by the knowledge arising out of Sruti passages like, 'Tat Tvam Asi.'

Of the two ideas, 'I am Existence-Absolute,' and 'I am the experienter,' both of which have the Immortal Self as the Witness, the latter which owes its origin to ignorance and which springs up from apparent evidences like sense-perception gets negated from the implied meaning (Lakshyarth) of the word 'I' (the implied meaning of 'I' is represented by the former) on the authority of the Sruti passages like, 'Tat Tvam Asi.'

Reasoning and Reiteration as Means

Some hold that one does not attain Absolute Liberation on hearing the words 'Tat Tvam Asi' or by knowing the literal meaning of the Maha Vakya without reiteration and reasoning. Hence they wish to enjoin these two things as essential means to the seeker after truth. They contend that on the absence of scriptural injunctions, our conduct should be deemed as non-scriptural which position is not desirable. According to them, the result 'Thou Art That' being stated as the end to be achieved, austerities, self-control, renunciation of things incompatible with that end, reiteration and reasoning should necessarily be accepted as the means enjoined for the attainment of that result.

It has been already stated that injunctions can be accepted provided the Upanishads particularise and define the end to be achieved. But, the Upanishads end with 'Neti, Neti.' The sentence 'Tat Tvam Asi' is not stated as a result to be attained through certain actions; the sentence proclaims the Truth. Therefore, even reiteration and reasoning cannot be enjoined as means to an end to the seeker of Truth.

The Actual Position

The superimposition of the ego on the eternally Free Self and transferring the ego's actions and experiences to the actionless Self is akin to the father's superimposing of the son's distress upon himself (upon the father) whereas, in truth, he (the father) has none. While stating 'Neti, Neti,' the scriptures do negate the superimposition as if that superimposition were a reality. Injunctions, reiteration, etc., are all due to that superimposition. While the superimposition which has no real existence by itself is negated, how can injunctions, reiteration, etc., be sustained? Are they not negated along with the superimposition? So, talking of injunctions when they are negated is not reasonable.

The negation of the ego from the Self is like the de-superimposition of the superimposed (in ignorance) colour from the sky by the ignorant people. This negation is not of a real thing. If real things were to be negated, then, surely, liberation would become transitory.

A certain amount of reiteration and reasoning is necessary to grasp the truth contained in the Sruti passage like 'Tat Tvam Asi' and to get firmly convinced of the same to the point of experience. But they cannot be construed to be injunctions on the lines of the Vedic ones. They help us to deny perceptual knowledge that is more powerful than inferential knowledge, and to strengthen our faith

in the inferential knowledge. They help us to negate ignorance, but, they do not directly and positively present us with Self-knowledge as a result of their being put to use as a means.

Self is Svayam-Prabha. It shines by Its own Light. It is known by Its Own Self. In the strict sense, there exists no means to realise the Self.

To a coward who doubts whether he exists or not what means can one suggest so that his (the coward's) existence can be 'attained' by him (the coward?).

2. EGO AND THE SELF

On account of its proximity to the Self, the ego appears to be conscious. Hence the two ideas or words 'I' and 'Mine' originate. As the ego is possessed of genus, action, etc., words are applicable to it. But words cannot be applied to the Self that is actionless and that is not an object for any word to point it out or signify it. A word or idea can only be applied to objects of knowledge and not to non-objects. So, Brahman or Self is not within the scope of any word or an idea.

Words that denote the ego and all the other things that reflect the Self only indirectly express the Self and by no means describe it directly. Similar to the application of words that denote the action of fire (e.g., burning) in an indirect way (never directly) to the torch etc. (e.g., the torch burns), words implying the Self (the word 'I' implying Existence, etc.) are applied to the ego which has the reflection of the Self in it, and further, appears to be like the Self.

Example of the Reflection of a face in a Mirror

The reflection of a face in a mirror is different from the face; the reflection imitates the mirror in as much as it possesses the property of being in the mirror and the quality of the mirror. The reflection depends on the mirror for its existence. But the real face does not. So, the real face is different from the reflection. Similarly, the reflection of the Self in the ego is different from the Pure Self.

In the case of the face, the face is real but not its reflection in the mirror. The reflection is not always there. But, at the same time, the reflection is not totally unreal since it is seen at times. Hence, the reflection is indescribable and the face is different from it. In the case of the Pure Self and Its reflection, in fact, however, both of them are devoid of any real distinction. In the case of the face and the mirror, the mirror has an existence independent of the face. But, in the case of the Pure Self, the intellect which is the reflecting medium is not having an independent existence all by itself, apart from the existence of the Pure Self. Therefore, the distinction between the Pure Self and Its reflection is only apparent and not real. Owing to a non-discrimination due to ignorance between the Pure Self and Its reflection, the Self is regarded as an individual suffering transmigratory existence. It may be said that the reflection of the Self in the ego, as distinct from the Pure Self, is the individual soul experiencing and acting in this universe, on the authority that the individual soul is a real entity having its own properties like the shadow of a tree having the property of refreshing any one coming under it on a hot midday. That cannot be so. The refreshing property cannot be attributed to the shadow, for it is the effect of refraining from the warm things, say, the hot sun. Further, because of that, it cannot be said that the refreshing property that is seen in the shadow is ample proof for accepting the reality of the shadow. One is not refreshed by sitting close to a burning hearth under its shadow.

The reflection of the face in the mirror is neither the property of the face nor the property of the mirror. If it were the property of either of the two, then, it should continue to exist when one of the two is not there. If it can be said that the reflection is the property of both the real face and the mirror, it can be equally refuted by saying that even when both the mirror and the face are there but improperly placed, the reflection is not seen.

The example of Rahu (Node), a real thing, is quoted to prove that a real thing may be seen at certain times and may not be seen at certain other times. In that case we learn about the reality of Rahu from Scriptures before we actually see it. Secondly, according to those who hold that Rahu is but the shadow of the Earth, it cannot be a real thing, as the unreality of the shadow has already been established.

The Experiencer of Transmigratory Existence

Transmigratory existence cannot be predicated of the Pure Self by virtue of Its being actionless; nor can it be predicated of the ego which is, devoid of a real existence, not a conscious entity. The only plausible explanation is that transmigratory existence is due to lack of proper discrimination between the Pure Self and the non-Self. Nevertheless, transmigratory existence has always an apparent existence solely due to the real existence of the Self, and further, appears to belong to the Self owing to indiscrimination. That is like the apparent existence had by the rope-snake on the basis of the reality of the rope, of course, prior to the discrimination between the rope and the snake.

It is only the people who cannot discriminate between the real and the unreal, between the Pure Self, Its reflection and the Intellect, who hold that the eternal Self is changeful on account of the modifications in the mind pertaining to It and is the experiencer of the transmigratory existence. They have no real understanding of the scriptures. They hold or mistake the ego to be the Self.

Words Implying the Self

The Vedas do imply the Self by the use of words like Knowledge, Existence, etc. There the implication becomes reasonable because the Self is of the nature of Pure Consciousness and Intellect has got the reflection of the Self in it. These words are directly applied to the Intellect carrying the reflection of the Pure Self in it and indirectly to the Pure Self.

It can be said that in words like 'Karoti' (He does), 'Gacchati' (He goes) etc., the Prakriti Artha of the Dhatu (meaning of the verb, it denotes an action) and the Pratyaya Artha (meaning of the verbal suffix, it denotes agency) belong to one and the same subject according to grammarians and laymen, whereas in words like 'Jaanaati' (He knows), the verb meaning and the meaning of the suffix denote two different subjects. The latter, exceptional case as it is, needs explanation.

In words like 'Jaanaati,' the meaning of the verbal suffix that involves an agent has reference to the reflection of the Self in the intellect and the meaning of the verb that involves an action has reference to a particular modification of the intellect. Due to indiscrimination between the reflection of the Self and the intellect, the word 'Knows' is wrongly applied to the Self. In reality, the intellect by itself, is devoid of consciousness and the Self is devoid of action; the word 'Knows' cannot be predicated of either of them on any reasonable ground whatsoever.

Knowledge construed to mean the action of knowing cannot be attributed to the eternal Self that is actionless. Knowledge in the sense of an instrument of the action of knowing can be applied only to the intellect and not to the Self. Possession of instrument implies agency and agency cannot be attributed to Self that is actionless. Neither can the word be applied to the Self in the senses of that which is the object of the action of knowing.

The Self is never knowable as an object, and is not denoted by any word directly by those who hold It to be Changeless, Actionless, Eternal and One only.

If the ego were the Self, then a word can be applied to it in its (the word's) primary meaning, Vachyartha. But, that position can never be had on account of scriptural passages that state that the Self is free from hunger, thirst, etc. That reduces us to the position that the primary meaning of words are not applicable. That means that words having no primary meaning cannot have secondary (Lakshya) ones, too. In that case, the Vedas, too, will lose their authority, inasmuch as they will be using meaningless words; and that position is not desirable. Solving this problem will land us in a dilemma.

To accept the popular usage of words is to accept the doctrine of the Charvakas and take the body to be the Self. To accept the view of the learned is to arrive at the dilemma that a word cannot be applied to the intellect which is devoid of consciousness, and likewise, to the Self which is devoid of action. Neither can it be said that the authoritative Vedas use meaningless words.

People use words like 'Knows' etc. without proper discrimination between the reflecting medium (intellect) and that which is reflected (the Self). Agency is attributed to the Self in using words like 'Knows' etc. on account of the superimposition of the agency of the intellect upon the Self. Likewise, the intellect is called the Knower owing to the Superimposition of the Conscious Self upon it (the intellect). In short, there exists Paraspara-Adhyasa. Consciousness belongs to the Pure Self, of which action cannot be predicated. Knowledge is eternal and is identical with the Self; the intellect cannot create it. Persons who hold that knowledge is produced (and thereby predicate agency in the act of knowing etc. of the intellect) are merely deluded by the modifications of a non-conscious intellect that appears to be conscious.

To sum up, though, strictly speaking, words like 'Knows' etc. cannot be applied either to the intellect or the Self, their application is rendered possible owing to indiscrimination between the Self, the intellect and the reflection of the Self in the intellect.

Need to Assume a Reflection of the Self

Certain schools of Buddhism hold that there exists no witness other than the modifications of the intellect, which modifications are, by themselves, both the perceivers and the perceived. Even if we are to accept the need for a Knower to these modifications who will be constant (Knower should be the same in respect to all modifications, as based on the evidence of recognition, on the evidence of the inherent capacity to synthesise all modifications and relate it to one individual) and who will know or witness the presence or otherwise of these modifications, some schools of Vedantins hold that there is no need to assume a reflection of the Self.

Accepting this knower cannot solve the problem, for, when once agency is predicated of it in the act of knowing, it comes under the non-conscious group. Similarly, dispensing with the reflection of the Self, it cannot be argued that these modifications are known by themselves due to their proximity to the eternal Knower, the Self. The Changeless, Actionless Knower - Self is of no utility. If proximity to the eternal Self be the sole factor in mental modifications being known by themselves, then, we should grant mental modifications to all insentient beings since the eternal Knower-Self is all-pervading.

To Whom is the Teaching Thou Art That?

Who is the aspirant to whom the words 'Thou Art That' are addressed? Who suffers pain and misery in ignorance and stands in need of the teaching 'Thou Art That'? The aspirant cannot be the eternal Witness Itself since It is untouched by ignorance and its effects. The aspirant cannot be either an agent. In that case, he cannot accept the idea, 'I am Brahman, the Witness.' As a result, the teaching 'Thou Art That' becomes a falsity and that position is not acceptable. The teaching can nevertheless be accepted, provided we grant indiscrimination due to ignorance between ego and the Self to the Sruti when it declares 'Tat Twam Asi.'

Should the Sruti discriminate between the ego and the Self, the foregoing defect arises, namely, that an agent to an action cannot be admitted to be the Witness. If it be said, like the Samkhyas, that the word 'Thou' finally refers to the Witness, the relation between the ego and the Self, in the absence of a reflection of the Self, should be established so that the word 'Thou' can have the implied meaning referring to the Witness.

The relation cannot be one of the Seer and the Seen, for it cannot be admitted in the case of the Witness which is devoid of activity. Neither can it be said that there exists an identity between the ego and the Witness though the latter is devoid of activity; there being no opportunity for the knowledge pertaining to that identity to exist in the absence of the knowledge of the relation that my Self, the Witness exists. The relationship cannot also be known through the scriptures on the following three grounds, viz., (a) The ego cannot know the relation as it is unconscious, (b) similarly in the case of the Witness-Self because It is changeless and actionless, and (c) the non-conscious ego cannot be taught by the Sruti. Granting that there still exists a relation between the ego and the Self, the knowledge of such relation can only be one of 'mine' and in no case one of identity.

To accept that the non-conscious intellect appears to be conscious, is to accept that the modifications of the intellect also appear to be so like sparks of red-hot iron. It should be noted that the act of pervading the intellect on the part of the Self-Witness, like fire pervading a mass of iron, is not a change on the part of the Self; the same has been refuted in the example of the mirror and the face. Further, it should be understood that an illustration and its subject can nowhere bear absolute similarity in all respects.

Conclusion

The knowledge on the part of the people of the appearance of the mental modifications and the disappearance of the same is possible on reasonable grounds only on account of (a) the existence of the Witness-Consciousness-Self and (b) the Limit (after a certain limit, the Self alone exists when everything else is negated). And on the acceptance of the reflection of the Self, it can be admitted that the intellect may know itself to be Brahman, for words that denote directly the reflection of the Self or the ego and other things which reflect the Self, indirectly imply the eternal Self. It has already been stated that the reflection is not real.

Nowhere in the Scriptures has it been stated that intellect is conscious; in that case, if it be conscious, we should attribute consciousness to the physical body and the senses too. Then the position of Charvakas comes in and that is neither desirable nor acceptable.

If the intellect be insentient, as it is, then in the absence of a reflection, the knowledge 'I am Brahman' is not possible. The teaching 'Tat Tvam Asi' will become useless as a result, i.e., in the absence of the possibility for the existence of the knowledge 'I Am Brahman.'

Therefore, the teaching 'Tat Tvam Asi' is only for those who can discriminate between the Self and the non-Self and who can understand the word 'thou' to directly mean the reflection of the Self in the intellect and indirectly to imply the eternal Self.

